



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
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Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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NATO in the Immediate Aftermath of 9/11

At the outset, NATO had been discredited as an institution because of Kosovo. There was initially a sense that the US was going to do whatever it needed to do in Afghanistan and that the experience in Kosovo precluded any real NATO involvement in combat operations. Everyone understood why the Americans wanted to do it on their own and to go their own way.

NATO's involvement with ISAF was about force generation in support of the training mission. They were equipped to that and to open lines of communication. But the caveats made it difficult for them to be involved in combat operations.

ISAF and OEF were kept strictly apart as a result. The Europeans did not want to get involved in peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations after the Balkans. They had a vague idea about the mission that it was something like "protected development."

The combat support that was offered after 9/11 was largely SOF (Special Operations Forces) support. That changed a bit with the Bonn process. The Bonn process had great weight with the alliance. There was a certain idea about Afghanistan that it might become a model for stabilization operations. They all thought they had all the time in the world and that they had a rather benevolent environment to do it in.

Record of Interview (continued)

The thought was that the military just needs a compliant partner so anybody with enough English and some combat experience would do. They go find people who speak English and who seem cooperative but it turns out that those people are the very ones who were abusing the population. It distorts the social structure.

Civilian Casualties

In 2005, the Taliban return, at the start of the year there's a doubling of civilian casualties. There were indications that trouble was coming. Gen. Jacob Page who was head of RC-South as commander and who had been former head of British Special Forces had some sort of sense that civilian casualties were important to track so he stood up what was supposed to be the "mother of all databases." (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

[REDACTED] Then the Canadian forces came and took over and they dropped it all together.

It should be a standard operating procedure from the start to record civilian casualties, but it wasn't. The military underestimated the long term strategic value of reputational risk and therefore really ignored the big picture implications of casualty tracking. The advantage of getting ahead on civilian tracking is that it establishes a reputation for being serious and showing that you're prepared to be accountable even before you're pressured to do it. There is a value of knowing what you have done as an organization whether in terms of civilian casualties or whether you're putting in water pumps for irrigation or building bridges.

As it stands, the system doesn't have any solid continuity to it and it means it's almost impossible to investigate anything after the fact.

PRTs

PRTs became a delivery arm of their embassies in Kabul, each with their own projects and goals. It's hard to say what the "PRT experiment" really added up to in the end. Each did its own thing with a strategy of their own, a plan of their own without regard to what the government or others were doing. That essentially justified the criticism that Karzai made about PRT's being a parallel government.

[NATO SCR] Gentelini made a valiant attempt with the PRT Steering Committee to coordinate but nations resented it. And, if the Americans weren't leading the way nothing happened. Unless the Americans energetically coordinated nothing happened because no one else has the authority and the weight to carry it off the way they do. But then when the Americans do get energetic about coordination the nations say, 'Wait a minute. We don't want to be dictated to by the Americans.'

Strategy

There was no center. There was no sense of common purpose. I didn't get there was a sense of urgency about the strategy. There was an illusion that the Afghan government was generally becoming more competent. But, in reality, strategy wasn't treated urgently. *Issues* became urgent but not the strategy.

Maybe there was less of an issue in the beginning because it seemed like Karzai and Washington were on track. The VTC's between Bush and Karzai may have contributed to that sense of things—that big brother, little brother relationship.

The sense of urgency came not from strategic decisions. It came from tactical concerns. You had this sense of urgency as it related to the operational and the tactical but not the strategic. What no one seemed to understand was that it becomes a strategy when you describe how to get the policy done with the resources you have. There were so many different strands of activity as Lute and others discovered that it was impossible to track strategy.

At one point, for example, you had CSTC-A trying to convince WHO to shift its plan to roll out a polio vaccination campaign in Helmand. It was just as the surge was about to start. They had to convince WHO not to do polio vaccination because it was a hostile environment. So you have people saying whose strategy is this anyway.

There were too many chains of command. You had the Marines and the British and the Canadians had their own chains of command. The only way the Americans could make it work was to create a crisis of credibility. If you don't create these tests everyone goes their own way.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) [REDACTED]

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(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) [REDACTED]

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